

Lineup indecision plagues the Big 12

By JAY SAUNDERS
Staff reporter

Nebraska Coach Frank Solich said deciding between his top two quarterbacks was the toughest decision he had to make in nearly 30 years of coaching football.

Solich might find some consolation in the fact that in the Big 12 Conference, he is not alone.

Going into fall practice, half of the teams in the Big 12 had not yet named a starting signal caller. And similar to Nebraska's case, several teams are facing the possibility of playing two quarterbacks in the same game.

"What is most important is having the best (quarterback) out there," Oklahoma Coach Bob Stoops said. "But there should always be competition."

With so many starting spots up for grabs this season, there is a lot of room for controversy.

Two bowl teams from a year ago find themselves having to replace Heisman Trophy candidates.

Kansas State's Michael Bishop confused defenses last year with his ability to run and throw. But now Bishop is gone, leaving junior Jonathan Beasley and senior Adam Helm to take over.

There has been no clear-cut starter named, but KSU Coach Bill Snyder said he would name a starter by the team's opener against Temple on Sept. 11.

"We are not in a two-quarterback system," Snyder said. "We have gone as late as the week prior to the first ball game to name a starter."

Missouri is in a similar situation. Corby Jones also pushed record numbers for the Tigers over the last two seasons.

In line to take Jones' job is a pair of quarterbacks with very little experience.

Sophomore Jim Dougherty and freshman Kirk Farmer are both candi-

"As a coach you want experienced players. And if there is a position you want experience at the most, it is quarterback."

LARRY SMITH
Missouri head coach

dates for the No. 1 signal caller role this year for the Tigers. But instead of naming an outright starter, Missouri coach Larry Smith is using a different approach.

"We are working on a quarterback system," Smith said. "We don't have a one and a two, but a 1A and 1B."

And then there is Iowa State. Despite having a 2-9 record a year ago, ISU Coach Dan McCarney has to worry about replacing Todd Bandhauer, who is the most successful quarterback in the team's history.

Replacing top quarterbacks is not something any coach wants to do. Smith said it was particularly difficult to lose players that had taken a lot of snaps.

"As a coach you want experienced players," Smith said. "And if there is a position you want experience at the most, it is quarterback."

Several teams have that experience coming back. Sophomore Major Applewhite returns for a second season as a starter at Texas. Senior Zac Wegner will also be back behind center at Kansas.

Texas A&M will also have an experienced signal caller. But even though he is returning, senior Randy McCown can sympathize with the players battling for position. Last year, McCown found himself playing behind Brandon Stewart.

This year, McCown has control of the Aggies' reins. And although McCown knows he can be replaced, he said it is nice not to have to deal with a

controversy. "It's nice to know that I'm the guy," McCown said. "But I know that I can be replaced."

Texas A&M is part of an elite group in the conference that had a clear-cut starter at the beginning of fall practice. Colorado is also in that situation with senior Mike Moschetti.

But teams have had success with a two-quarterback system in recent years. Nebraska and Colorado have both used a pair of quarterbacks in the past with positive results.

So are two heads better than one? Texas A&M Coach R.C. Slocum said he would love to have a talented backup in case of an injury to McCown this year.

"We've clearly got a starter, and that makes it easier for a team to rally around a guy," Slocum said. "But I would feel comfortable if we had a backup with experience."

Experience is something all of the Big 12 coaches said they wanted in a quarterback.

Former Nebraska Coach Tom Osborne would not play in one of the "preseason" games unless he had a returning starter at quarterback.

But that isn't always the case. Baylor Coach Kevin Steele, who has a quarterback controversy of his own, said choosing between two players for an important position was one of the toughest things to do.

"A quarterback decision is always a problem," Steele said. "To have a returning quarterback is a blessing."

Inexperience widespread problem for Big 12 teams

■ Volleyball squads throughout the conference have freshmen and sophomores on their starting rosters.

By ADAM J. KLINKER
AND JOHN GASKINS
Staff writers

A wealth of youthful talent and inexperience seems to be the shared fate of several volleyball teams around the Big 12 Conference this season.

While 10 of the 11 teams return at least three starters, some schools are faced with the prospect of starting freshmen and sophomores in positions held last year by seniors.

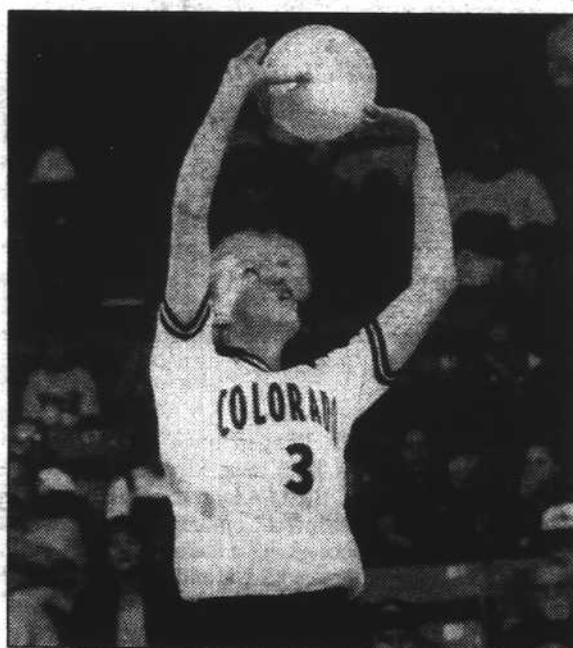
But the prospect of nearly every one of the league's top seven teams from last season losing such high-quality talent means only that the conference will be wide open for 1999.

"There's a lot of parity in the league this year," Texas Coach Jim Moore said. "We're not the experienced conference we were last year, but we've got a lot of new talent."

Kansas Coach Ray Bechard agreed.

"The conference will be amazing," Bechard said. "I sense we could be the best conference in the country."

The Big 12 boasts five teams ranked in the preseason AVCA Top 25



CU SPORTS INFORMATION
COLORADO SENIOR SETTER Kelly Campbell, a 1999 national Player-of-the-Year candidate, will look to help the Buffaloes improve on their 22-8 record.

Poll - equaling the Big West and Big 10. Nebraska leads the group with a No. 3 ranking, followed by No. 13 Texas, No. 16 Texas A&M, No. 19 Colorado and No. 23 Kansas State.

Despite the fact that they lost three starters, two of which were All-Americans, Nebraska is picked by the league coaches to win the Big 12 for the third time in the league's four-year

history. The Huskers will be going after their 21st conference title in Pettit's 23 seasons as head coach.

A big reason for this is what Terry Pettit said could very well be his best-ever freshman class, which was ranked third-best in the nation by Volleyball Magazine.

The freshmen should complement an already deep squad, led by junior outside hitter Nancy Meendering, who was voted as the pre-season favorite for player-of-the-year honors. Laura Pilakowski, a 6-1 outside hitter and middle blocker from Columbus, was

voted as preseason Big 12 Freshman of the Year.

Nebraska will also see firepower from freshman Greichaly Cepero, a Puerto Rican junior team member who was recruited as a setter but will see lots of time at attacker in NU's new

Please see VOLLEY on 14

Competitive field propels young program

By BROCK WENDLANDT
Staff writer

The intense rivalry between soccer foes Nebraska and Texas A&M has encompassed the Big 12 Conference in its three-year existence.

Both teams captured their own Big 12 crown in the first two years - with NU taking the conference and tournament titles in 1996 and A&M doing the same in 1997. But lost in the shuffle was the fact Baylor nudged out both teams for the Big 12 regular season crown in 1998.

While NU and A&M are still considered the cream of the crop in the conference this year, some of the Big 12 coaches see the conference as strong from top to bottom - and aren't ruling out another surprise champion.

"Nebraska is definitely the favorite and the one to beat," said Missouri Head Coach Bryan Blitz, whose team finished 5-5 in conference play and was in a three-way tie with Iowa State and Texas. "But behind them it's a toss up - and Missouri, Texas A&M, Baylor and Iowa State will all make a big push."

Oklahoma State Head Coach Karen Hancock said Nebraska and Texas A&M will be closely followed by Baylor but hinted that the Bears' new head coach and loss of forward Molly Cameron to a season-ending anterior cruciate ligament injury are the reasons most people are ruling out a repeat championship.

She echoed that the conference title race will be as close as it has ever been.

Blitz used Nebraska's narrow 1-0 victory over Texas Tech last week as an example of the conference's overall strength.

Although many teams will have to play their best soccer to beat Nebraska, he said, it will be possible.

"The growth of our conference doesn't allow for a bad day," Blitz said. "I think we are becoming talked about on the same level with the ACC and the Pac 10."

He added that his own team is gaining respect and hoping to challenge for the top spot in the conference.

Missouri has all 11 of its starters back, Blitz said, and has made great efforts in the off season to fill some holes.

"We felt like we were three players away from Nebraska as far as talent was concerned last year," he said. "And we think that we have added that talent with our new players, but whether or not our new players will mesh is yet to be determined."

Iowa State Head Coach Cathy Klein agreed that the Big 12 is shaping up to be very strong and much more competitive this year but felt that NU and A&M will still come out on top.

"The Big 12 has enough talent and commitment and is clearly one of the top conferences in the country," she said. "But there is a definite top two, and the rest of the conference will be a case of survival of the fittest and of who wants to slug it out to the end."

Texas A&M and Nebraska, she said, are very gifted teams that are to be feared because of the way they perform in the clutch.

The ability of her own team to perform in pressure situations, Klein said, will be a key factor in Iowa State's season.

"We are starting six freshman, and any time you have that many new faces, there will be peaks and valleys in the season," she said.

Oklahoma State had its fair share of pressure situations last year.

The Cowgirls went 1-2-3 in conference overtime games with a very inexperienced team, Hancock said.

"In this conference," she said, "all the teams are going to get their chances. It's just a matter of who can get it done."

Klein complimented all 11 institutions in the conference for their efforts to improve the conference as a whole.

"The Big 12, because of the financial support it has, is developing its programs quicker than the rest of the country," she said. "This year is our strongest year, and the competition is only getting better."

Oklahoma, who finished 10th in the conference last year, is hoping its presence will soon be felt.

"Right now," Head Coach Randy Evans said, "we can compete with most teams. It would have to be a special day to knock off Nebraska or A&M at this point, but we have all expectations of being right with them in the next few years."

"The big advantage of this conference is that every school has the potential to excel and that is the driving force behind this conference."

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